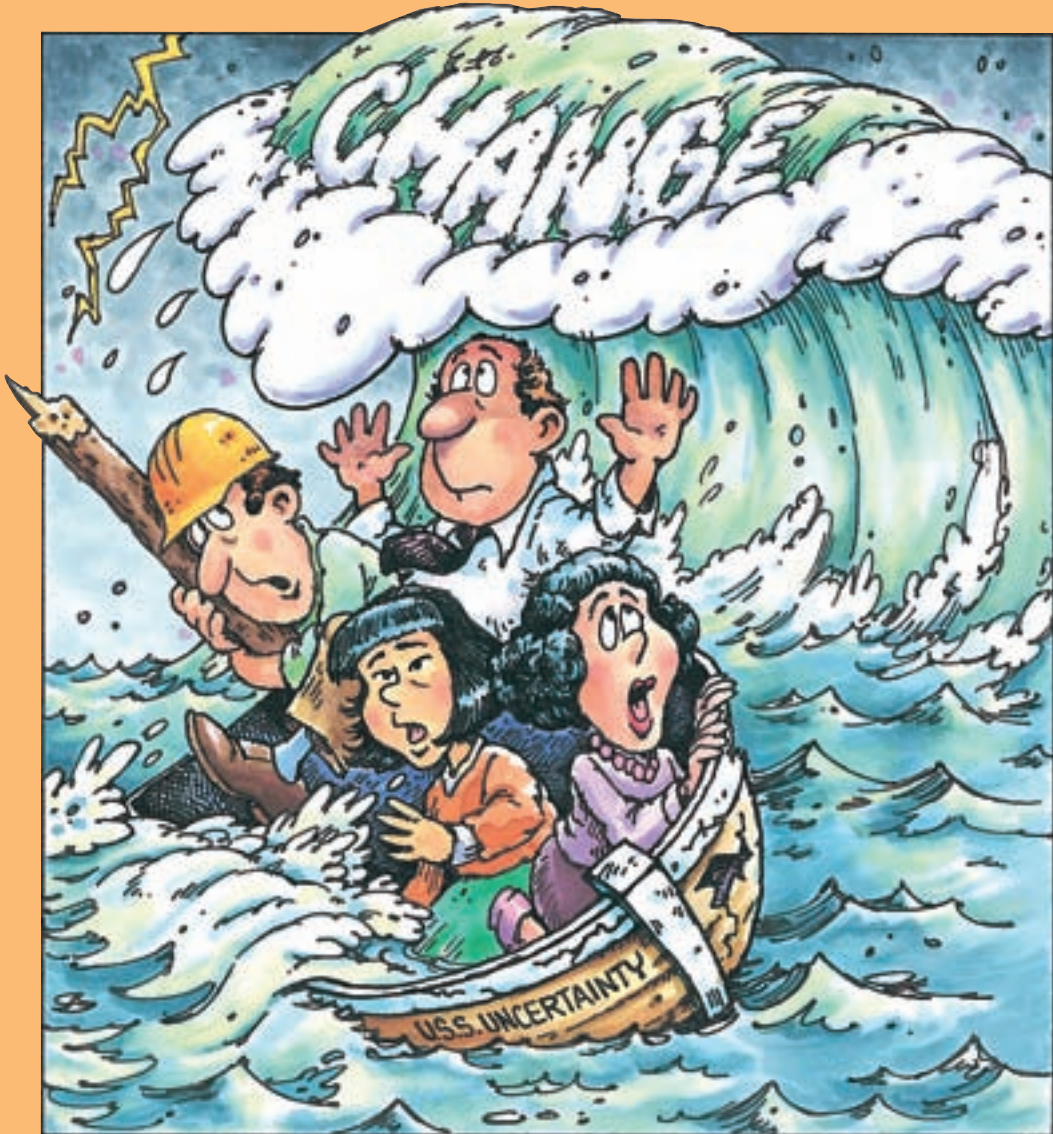


# COPING WITH **CHANGE**



How to Manage  
the Stress of Change

# CONTROLLING YOUR RESPONSE TO CHANGE



Change is a fact of life. But today's rapid rate of change can be a tidal wave. Job changes, promotions, single parenting, aging parents—today's common stresses at work and home may leave you feeling helpless, angry, guilty, or depressed about the loss of what's familiar. You can't always control change, but you can control your **response** to it. Looking for opportunities in the situation may help you get to shore.

## Awash in a Sea of Change

In today's highly competitive, less predictable economy, old ways of coping with work must be modified. You must adapt—or risk drowning. And home, which you may look to as a haven from work-related stresses, is rocked by change, too. Juggling home and career, an increase in single-parent families, child care problems, aging parents—without the old charts to navigate by, how can you make it through?

## Getting Through the Storm

Many people are rocked by change because they don't know where they're heading. This book helps you know yourself and how change affects you. Then it gives you specific skills to help you cope with changes and develop a positive attitude, at work and at home.



### Know Yourself

Knowing the life cycle of change and your own values, strengths, limitations, and goals will give you the confidence to make your way safely to shore.



### Learn Coping Skills

The next step is to learn concrete coping skills. These include evaluating yourself and your situation, setting goals, getting support, listing opportunities, and taking action.



### Develop a Positive Attitude

How you look at change can make the difference between sinking and swimming. Change can be positive or negative—it depends on your reaction.

This booklet is not intended as a substitute for your company's policies or professional healthcare.

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# ARE YOU STRESSED BY CHANGE?

Change is a problem only when you can't relax and recover from it. Use this stress assessment to pinpoint your stressors and understand your own stress cycle. Later, you can use this knowledge about yourself to deal with change in a more productive, take-charge way.

## Your Stressors

### At work:

- YES NO** Change in responsibilities
- YES NO** Job change—promotion, transfer, merger/acquisition, retirement, layoff
- YES NO** Workload too heavy or light
- YES NO** Fears about job security
- YES NO** Interpersonal relations—conflicts with coworkers, superiors, subordinates
- YES NO** Job expectations unclear—anxiety due to insufficient feedback

### At home:

- YES NO** Difficulties balancing family and career
- YES NO** Change in financial status
- YES NO** Significant change in life of family member (marriage, child leaves home, aging, death)
- YES NO** Change in residence

### Personal:

- YES NO** Change in life stage (divorce, marriage, remarriage, parenthood, grandparenthood)
- YES NO** Change in health
- YES NO** Change in lifestyle habits

Checking off this list should make you aware of your stressors. Knowing what stresses you is the first step to getting through the storm.

## Your Stress Cycle

- YES NO** Do you feel a period of relaxation and renewal after stress?

If so, that's **positive stress**: a balance of arousal and relaxation that helps you concentrate, achieve what you want, and survive.

- YES NO** Do you feel you can't relax when you want to?

If so, that may be **negative stress**: constant arousal that can lead to high blood pressure, heart attack, ulcers, and worse. But you can learn to replace negative stress with solutions that work for you and help you better adapt to change.





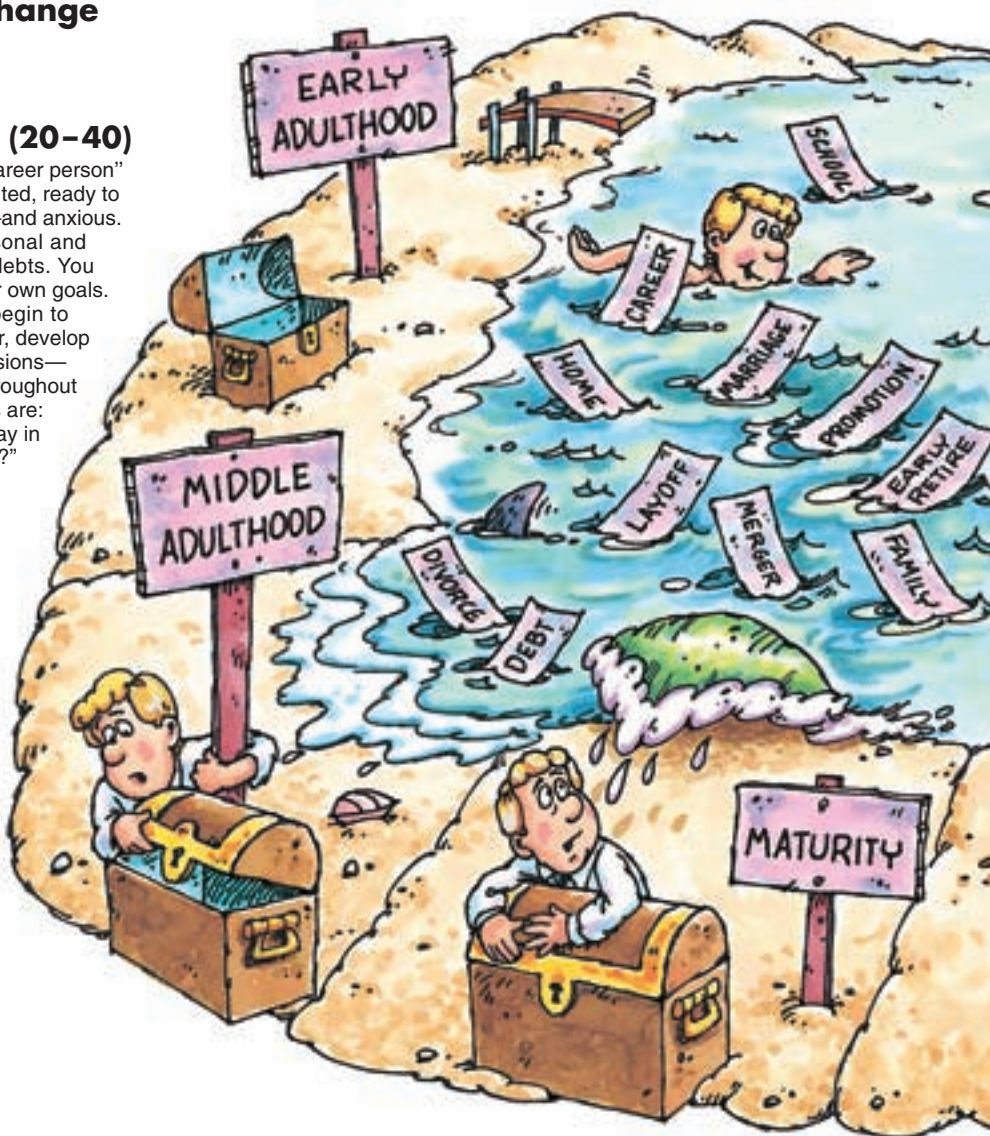
## KNOW YOURSELF

Change affects all of us, but it affects us differently depending on where we are in the life cycle. We all move from one life stage to the next. This movement, or change, is called **transition**. You can make these transitions more easily and successfully if you understand the stages of the life cycle. Below, you will find the kinds of events

### A Lifetime of Change

#### Early Adulthood (20–40)

Moving from student to “career person” may leave you feeling excited, ready to get in the swim of things—and anxious. You may have many personal and family obligations, even debts. You may or may not know your own goals. But sooner or later, you begin to establish family and career, develop skills, and acquire possessions—treasures you will carry throughout your life. Typical questions are: “How should I make my way in the world? What do I want?”



#### Middle Adulthood (40–50)

You may feel increasingly content at work and at home. You are more clear about who you are, what you want, and which habits you can and cannot change. Or you may experience a “midlife crisis,” reevaluating earlier choices about partner, career, children, or achievements. “What is my life adding up to?” is a frequent, often painful question. Sudden changes in career, home life, or finances may make you cling to shore.

#### Maturity (50–65)

In this often satisfying period of life, change may seem like a wave that threatens your income, status, or hard-won stability. With many good work years left, you may feel uncomfortable about retirement and detaching from the work world. How will you spend your leisure time? With the children grown, you can pay more attention to yourself and your partner.



that people experience during the different periods of life—early adulthood, middle adulthood, maturity, and 65 plus. Of course, there are many variations. For example, some people welcome change more when they are younger; some people become more comfortable with change as they get older. Knowing the life cycle of change and your place in it will help you move through your life more confidently.



### 65 Plus

If you are financially prepared and know your interests, you are ready to enter the waters of an enjoyable retirement. Being with grandchildren, being a role model for younger people, or beginning a new career can keep you busy with meaningful challenges and enjoyable leisure pursuits.

## Stages of Change

Change often means loss. We all must detach from the familiar, and reattach to the new. Many of us get stuck along the way, even when we choose the change. Healthy coping means dealing with losses realistically and letting go of what must be given up in order to move on.

### Hit by the Storm

Some changes occur suddenly. Others build to a head more gradually. When the impact hits, you may be in shock, enraged, or in a panic. You may feel like you're drowning. You may slip back into old, familiar, unproductive habits. Instead, ask yourself, "What's at stake?" and "What can I do?"



### In the Foggy Middle

Transition: the longest, most uncomfortable stage. The old shore is gone; the new land is not yet in sight. This is a time for reflection as well as action. A personal retreat or repeated brainstorming with people you trust will help you get clear. Coping now includes tolerating the fog.



### On Firm Ground

No matter how long it takes, you do make it to shore, often stronger than before. You know more about who you are, what you want, and how to adapt to the change. Assess which skills and help worked best for you. Now you're ready to engage in new goals, plans, and directions.





## KNOW YOURSELF

As well as knowing where you are in the cycle of change, you also need to know specific things about yourself. Discovering what's most important to you—your priorities and values—will help you make choices that really work for you. For example, do you like a job with strong, defined leadership or lots of room for independence?

### What Do I Value Most?

Look at these areas of your work, home, and personal life, and ask yourself, "What matters to me most?" The only right answer is the one that is right for you.

**JOB:** How important is work to me? What do I want from it? What do I like, dislike, or want to change about it?

**KIND OF WORK:** Do I like predictable, creative, secure, or independent work? Do I need room to grow or human interaction?

**TEAM INVOLVEMENT:** Do I work best alone or with others? Do I want strong leadership or room for independence?

**FEELINGS ABOUT CHANGE:** Do I like it? Do I seek it or avoid it? What can and can't I change?

**SECURITY:** How do I define it? What kind and how much do I need—emotionally and physically as well as financially?

**RISK-TAKING:** How do I define it? What areas will I take chances in? Do I welcome new, challenging experiences?

### ECONOMIC SECURITY AND WEALTH:

How much money do I need to live well? How can I prioritize current income?

### INTEGRITY AND INNER HARMONY:

How important is honesty, self-respect, and standing up for my beliefs? Being at peace with myself?

**PERSONAL LIFE:** What about this matters to me? Relationships with others? Self-development? Time off? Travel?

**FAMILY:** How important is my family to me in terms of: Time? Kinds of activities I want us to share? Shared values?

**FRIENDS:** How important is friendship? Keeping up with old friends? Making new ones? How much time do I want to spend?

**WHERE I LIVE:** Where do my family and I want to live? What are financial, personal, school, career considerations?





Once you have a clear sense of what's important to you, knowing where your strengths and limitations lie will further clarify who you are and what kind of work situations might best use your skills and personality. And defining your work and personal goals—both short-term and long-term—will give you a destination to aim for, mobilize your strengths toward, and eventually reach.

**What Are My Strengths and Limitations?**

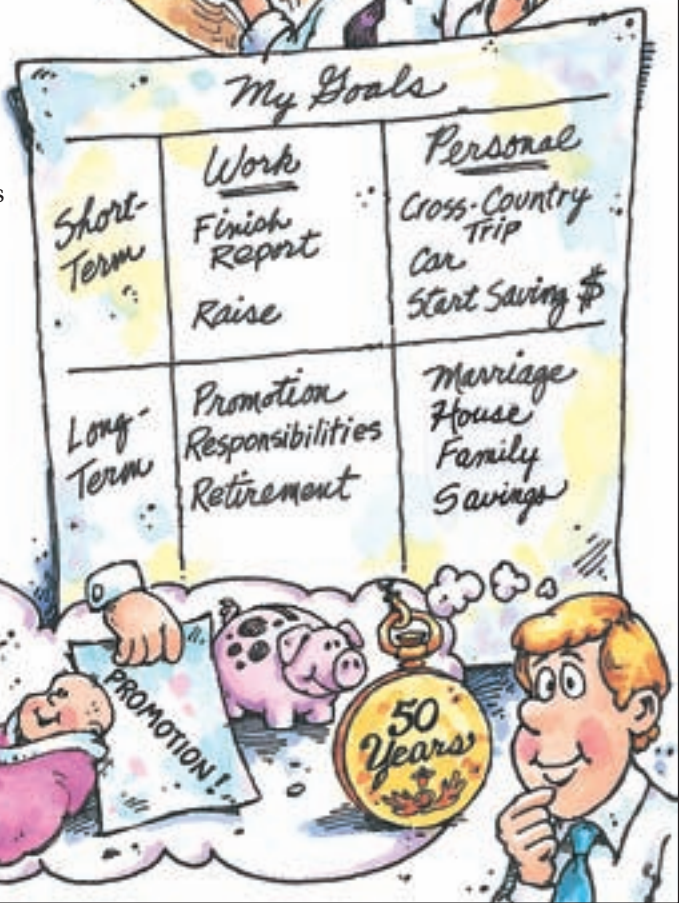
**Strengths:** Am I responsible? Caring? Organized? Innovative? Open-minded? Good at detail or the larger picture? A good motivator? Clear communicator? Good coordinator?

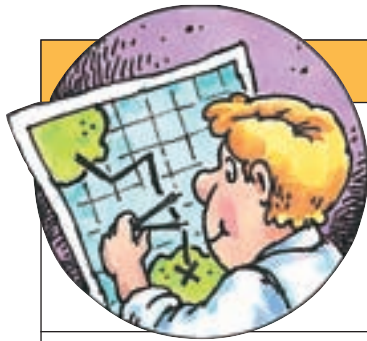
**Limitations:** Do I juggle too much work at once? Say “yes” when I really should say “no”? See the forest and forget the trees, or vice versa? What could I do better?



**What Are My Goals?**

We need goals. They guide us through a challenging period of change. Without them, change takes shape more slowly; with them, the wind is at your sails. It's important to have both work-related goals and personal goals—they tend to influence each other. List your goals, both short-term and long-term. Things that may currently seem out of reach come into focus when you move toward them gradually. What do you want for yourself right now? In 6 months? 1 year? 3 years? 10 years? At retirement?





# LEARN COPING SKILLS FOR CHANGES

All change involves loss—feelings of sadness and frustration. Life is a series of continuous attachments and detachments, and sometimes it's hard to move on. Today, changes at work occur more rapidly and frequently than

## ❑ First Job



**Problem:** If this is your first job, you may be eager—and confused. School once structured your life, routines, and expectations. Now the learning situation is more practical than theoretical. Now you get a performance review (maybe infrequently) instead of grades. You may wonder, “What should I be doing? Where am I going in my life?” You may or may not know for sure.



**Solution: SET GOALS.** Find out what aspects of this job fit your goals. Maybe it's the work itself; maybe it's the skills you acquire along the way. Your learning goes on, but now it's informal. **FIND ROLE MODELS.** Look to peers, senior members, and mentors. Who is doing things well? Whom do you admire? What you pick up now will influence your choices later.

## ❑ Job Changes



**Problem:** Competition from aggressive new markets may have changed your work life. Your project, product, or department may have been changed or discontinued. Despite your loss and confusion, you still must produce—often on a project you don't know much about or feel connected to, and with a reduced staff. Maybe you have a new boss to get used to, too.



**Solution: EVALUATE YOUR SITUATION AND MAKE AN ACTIVE DECISION.** Understanding the big picture will help you change effectively. Determine whether the new job matches your values. Ask experts for help on getting perspective and deciding where to invest your energies. Let go of the old job and get involved in the new job. And keep on learning.



## AT WORK

ever before, and loss is part of that change. Even positive changes, like a job promotion, involve loss. Should you find yourself in any of the following situations, or any other kind of work-related change, any or all of the coping skills described here may help you navigate the storm.

### ❑ Balancing Family and Career



**Problem:** If you are a working parent, especially a single parent, you must work enough hours to pay your bills plus child care. Trying to do your best at home and at work may leave you feeling worried, guilty, and inadequate. What if your child gets sick? How do you choose the best child care so you can focus on work when you're at work? If your child acts unhappy or is troublesome, is it your fault?



**Solution: SEEK SUPPORT**—from your coworkers, friends, and family. Get encouragement, caring, and ideas. Find a child care situation you can trust, and then let go. **LEARN THE TYPICAL STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT.** All kids have problems, whether their parents work or not. Knowing the stages of child development can free you from worry and guilt about being a working parent.

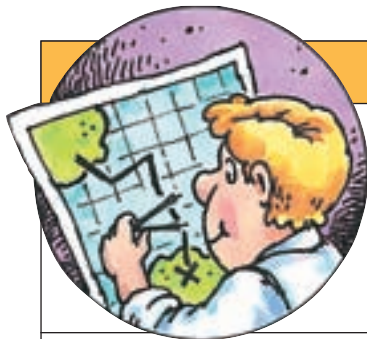
### ❑ Getting Promoted



**Problem:** You may have received a promotion. Congratulations! No one would think of offering you sympathy. Yet you may feel anxious, confused, or sad. The fact is that even positive changes can cause a sense of loss. You may have been very good at your old job, and quite comfortable. Now things are new, and you may worry that you can't meet your responsibilities successfully. What to do?



**Solution: GET INVOLVED, GET SUPPORT, AND TAKE IT STEP BY STEP.** For a while you may have to work harder and see less of your family. This is normal, even invigorating. But seek support from peers, mentors, family, and friends. Ask experts and others who have been promoted for tips on succeeding at the new job. Break the work down into small steps. And take time out for renewal.



# LEARN COPING SKILLS FOR CHANGES

Technology—the fastest blowing wind on today's seas. In this Age of Information, computers have changed the workplace overnight. New products change from month to month. Jobs are affected, and you can sink (cling to

## ❑ Changing Technology

**Problem:** Computers may have replaced manual systems in your office. Computerization may have changed the organization of your department, work habits, even job duties. You may feel confused, angry, anxious. You may no longer feel so competent. You may even have more work to do—on a strange machine that you don't understand and may not even like.

**Solution: KEEP ON LEARNING.** Nowadays, all of us need to keep learning to keep up with changing technology. Get help from manuals, books, on-the-job teachers and helpers, or adult education classes. Learning new and different computer systems increases your value in the job market—and your confidence. Seek out new information **before** you need it, through professional seminars, for instance.



## ❑ Company Mergers and Acquisitions

**Problem:** If your company was acquired by another company, things at work may look very uncertain. A number of doubts surface: "What will happen to me? To my coworkers? Will I be fired? Demoted? Relocated?" You feel loss, confusion, anxiety. You're afraid to take risks and make mistakes. The trust level is down, some coworkers are gone, and you're in "unofficial mourning."

**Solution: LIST THE OPPORTUNITIES.** This can seem a problem—or an opportunity. Get acquainted with the new organizational culture. What are their values, behaviors, work beliefs, ethics, and work routines? Do they fit you? What messages do the leaders give the rank and file about what to expect? It may take some time to see if the fit works or not. List all the positive opportunities as you see them.





## AT WORK

your old ways) or swim (adapt to the change). If you're facing changing technology, mergers, acquisitions, possible layoffs, or retirement, you'll need to cope with these changes successfully. The skills listed on these pages can help you plot your course with confidence.

### ☐ Layoffs

**Problem:** You may have been laid off due to a merger that, in combining departments, made some jobs unnecessary. Yours was one of them. Now you feel panicky—"Can I pay the bills?" You feel guilty, angry, and victimized—"Why me?" Yet you secretly may wonder if you were at fault. And in this state of lowered confidence, you have to go out and face a competitive job market.

**Solution: EVALUATE THE SITUATION.** Don't take it personally. Assess areas of control, priority of bills, feasibility of unemployment insurance. What are your skills, accomplishments, and current and future career goals? **USE YOUR PERSONAL NETWORK**—the best way to find work. Talk to clients, friends, mentors, or your personnel department, Employee Assistance Program, or union.



### ☐ Early Retirement

**Problem:** Your company may have offered you early retirement. You may feel self-doubting, not quite finished with projects. Yet time for new things sounds good. But how will you structure your time, when your job has done that all along? How will you pay the bills?

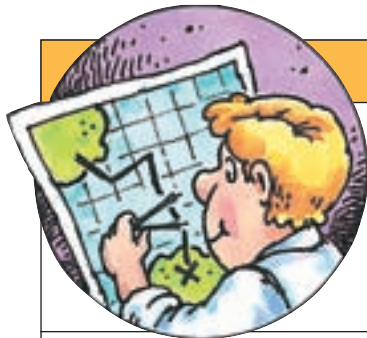
**Problem:** You may be retiring on your own terms, and with sufficient money. Even so, the change can be stressful. It's common to feel bored when you have too much leisure time. When activities aren't planned by others, you may find that the challenge is missing.



**Solution: ASSESS YOUR SITUATION.** Can you afford to retire now? Can you expand on current meaningful activities, or find new ones? Is your partner ready for home to be your base of operations? Might it be time to start a new career? Choose what's best for you.



**Solution: PLAN AHEAD.** before retiring. Expand activities you currently enjoy, or find new (or old) dreams to build on. Turn a favorite hobby into a business, travel—do things that reflect you in a meaningful, creative, and productive way. Build on your past pleasures in life.



## LEARN COPING SKILLS FOR CHANGES

Changes at home can increase your stress and affect your work life unless you cope with them. Even when changes are positive, like a new child or a welcome move, they still involve loss. More difficult changes—like the loss of a

### Birth



**Problem:** A new baby! It's wonderful—but it's hard on both of you. You don't sleep through the night. The "old you" seems to have disappeared. Money has to stretch further. Your relationship with your spouse is suddenly in the background. You have to give up so much—for a while or for good. And on top of this, you're supposed to go to work and look alert and cheerful.



**Solution: GET SUPPORT.** Enlist extended family and friends to help out by baby-sitting or cooking. Trade child care with other parents. Take time for yourself. Go out for an evening with your partner and have some fun again. **ACCEPT YOUR NEW LIFE.** Some things are gone. Now what negotiations can you make with your partner? Find solutions that fit everyone's values and goals.

### Moving



**Problem:** You may be moving by choice or because the company is relocating you. In either case, moving can be extremely stressful, even grief-producing. Loss of the old home, neighborhood, friends, connections—the whole family feels it. In addition, there's the mental stress of coordinating details and the physical stress of packing, unpacking, and settling in.



**Solution: LIMIT CHANGES.** You don't have to furnish the new house overnight. Prioritize your needs—and do only what's necessary. Break up big tasks into small ones; spread them out over time. **STICK TO FAMILIAR RITUALS.** for a while. Keep as many things stable as possible, to make you feel safe. Before you unpack anything, unpack a favorite object, to make you feel at home.



# AT HOME

partner or your parents' aging—can be harder to adjust to. Some changes are easy to cope with; others, such as tragic death, may seem so catastrophic that survival is the most immediate challenge. Here are some healthy ways to plot your course through these common, major life changes.

## ❑ Loss of a Partner



**Problem:** If you have lost a partner, the demands on you will increase, especially if you have children. Yet you still must deal with daily life, while experiencing many intense feelings. Many people try to bury themselves in pain-dulling activity, or feel too overwhelmed, angry, or self-blaming to carry on. How do you take care of you, your children, and the tasks of daily life?

**Solution: PRIORITIZE TASKS.** Make it easier by making a list of what needs to be done and who can do it. Enlist help with child care and cleaning. **DEAL WITH YOUR FEELINGS.** If grief, anger, or depression persist, you may want to seek professional counseling to cope with these feelings. Keep up your friendships. Let your friends and family show they care.

## ❑ Aging Parents



**Problem:** You may have aging parents who are depending on you for care. This can stress both finances and emotions. Painful questions arise: Should you pay their medical bills? Put them into a convalescent home? Have them live with you? If you do these things, how will that affect your own life? These considerations may make you feel guilty, angry, and frightened.

**Solution: GET HELP.** Have a family meeting, including siblings, partner, and older children, to design a plan for your parents' care. Consult with your parents, too. Look into visiting professionals who help elderly people with medication, food, and homemaking services. Look in the phone book, talk to your EAP and medical department at work, or call your local hospital for more information.



## DEVELOP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

In addition to knowing the stress cycle and your own unique characteristics, a positive attitude is crucial to weathering change successfully. How you perceive the situation determines how you experience it. It's easy to fall into negative ways of seeing difficult experiences.



### ☐ Reach Out

When you're feeling low, you may be tempted to keep well-wishers at arm's length. But asking for love, encouragement, honest and caring feedback, or just an understanding ear can help you get back on course. Reach out to those who care about you and who can help you see things as positively as possible.



### ☐ Laugh

Humor is one of the best stress-relievers going. Take the time to find the humor in your situation. Humor and worry don't mix. And research shows that laughing actually makes people healthier.



### ☐ A Change of Scenery

Sometimes "getting away from it all" is exactly the thing to do. It's hard to take your problem so seriously when you change your perspective. Change your routine—if you work indoors, take a walk in the woods; if you work outdoors, do something indoors, like going to a museum or a movie.

### ☐ Love a Pet

An animal's generous, unconditional love—and unworried, unhurried pace—can restore your calm and your sanity. Just taking a moment out to sit with your pet can remind you how good life is.

### Some Don'ts

Some activities do not reduce stress in the long run—in fact, they may make things worse. Don't abuse drugs, alcohol, or even coffee, cigarettes, or food: they can drain your energy. Don't spend money on things you can't afford—that will drain your finances. Don't "burn out" job hunting or wait months to start looking. And don't rely only on sympathy: use positive coping skills, which will pay you back in vitality and results.





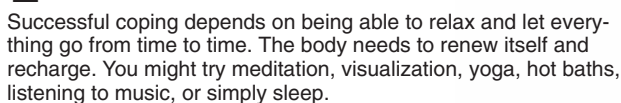
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We talk to ourselves all the time—usually critically. But negative self-talk just makes you feel worse. Instead of saying, “You sure blew that one,” try talking to yourself positively: “You learned that new step very well.” Notice all the little things you do right. Make lists of your positive accomplishments, and post them in visible places.

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If, after trying all the skills suggested here, things still aren't working, don't give up. Depression is a common, reversible response to a big change. Many people seek out professional help at times like this. Look in your phone book to find your local mental health association or community workshop on stress. Call your EAP, medical or personnel department, doctor, or clergy for help and information.



## STEERING YOUR OWN COURSE

Change is a fact of life. You can't stop it, but you don't have to drown in it. Know yourself, learn specific coping skills to help you navigate, and develop a positive attitude. Then, no matter what's changing at work or home, you can weather the storm and the fog, and put your feet confidently on shore.



**Consultant:**

Stephen G. White, PhD

**With contributions by:**

Perry W. Buffington, PhD

Rebecca A. Thomas, Personnel Director

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